

St. John's Chapel  
Rts. 617 and 638 intersection  
Boswell's Tavern vicinity  
Green Springs Historic District  
Louisa County  
Virginia

HABS No. VA-1238

HABS  
VA,  
55-BOSWELL,  
3-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, D.C.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

HABS  
VA  
55-BOSWE.V,  
3-

ARCHITECTURAL DATA FORM

STATE Virginia	COUNTY Louisa	TOWN OR VICINITY Boswells Tavern vicinity; Green Springs Historic District
HISTORIC NAME OF STRUCTURE (INCLUDE SOURCE FOR NAME) St. John's Chapel (National Register Nomination Form)		HABS NO. VA-1238
SECONDARY OR COMMON NAMES OF STRUCTURE None.		
COMPLETE ADDRESS (DESCRIBE LOCATION FOR RURAL SITES) At the intersection of Routes 617 and 638.		
DATE OF CONSTRUCTION (INCLUDE SOURCE) (National Register 1888 Nomination Form)	ARCHITECT(S) (INCLUDE SOURCE) Unknown	
SIGNIFICANCE (ARCHITECTURAL AND HISTORICAL, INCLUDE ORIGINAL USE OF STRUCTURE) St. John's Chapel is an excellent example of the Gothic Revival idiom expressed in vernacular architecture, popularly known as carpenter gothic. Has had continual use as a chapel.		
STYLE (IF APPROPRIATE) Gothic Revival		
MATERIAL OF CONSTRUCTION (INCLUDE STRUCTURAL SYSTEMS) Clapboarded frame construction with stone foundation; roof covered with asbestos shingle.		
SHAPE AND DIMENSIONS OF STRUCTURE (SKETCHED FLOOR PLANS ON SEPARATE PAGES ARE ACCEPTABLE) One-and-one-half stories; rectangular; front facade measures 27' wide, with a length of 48'.		
EXTERIOR FEATURES OF NOTE Steeply pitched gabled roof. This steep pitch is repeated in the gabled vestibules. The entranceways and the grouped floor windows are lancet-shaped arches. The sanctuary is lighted with a series of triangular dormers along the sides of the chapel and a single round window in the central bay of the main (continued)		
INTERIOR FEATURES OF NOTE (DESCRIBE FLOOR PLANS, IF NOT SKETCHED) Simple interior with exposed timber truss system, pine panel walls, and chestnut benches.		
MAJOR ALTERATIONS AND ADDITIONS WITH DATES None.		
PRESENT CONOITION AND USE This Episcopal chapel is used for special occasions only. Good condition.		
OTHER INFORMATION AS APPROPRIATE It is thought that the Overton, Morris and Watson families built this church after the Civil War as a place of worship for the neighborhood. Many members of these families are buried in the adjoining graveyard.		
SOURCES OF INFORMATION (INCLUDING LISTING ON NATIONAL REGISTER, STATE REGISTERS, ETC.) National Register of Historic Places Inventory - Nomination Form.		
COMPILER, AFFILIATION Dorinda E. Williams, student, Mary Washington College		DATE April 23, 1985

EXTERIOR FEATURES OF NOTE (continued)

facade. Pilasters define the principal facade's central bay and the vestibules. These elements are further articulated by patterns of flush and diagonal siding.

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Addendum to  
St. John's Chapel  
Rts. 617 and 640 Intersection  
Boswells Tavern vicinity  
Louisa County  
Virginia

HABS No. VA-1238

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, DC 20013-7127

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

Addendum to  
ST. JOHN'S CHAPEL

HABS No. VA-1238  
(Page 3)

Location: At intersection of State Routes 617 and 640, Green Springs Historic District, Boswells Tavern vicinity, Louisa County, Virginia

USGS Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates:  
17.749370/42.11460

Present Owner: members of the congregation

Present Use: As the congregation is very small, the chapel is only used for funerals and on Thanksgiving.

Significance: St. John's Chapel is a prime example of the rural Gothic style found in the southern United States, which drew from such sources as the work of A.W.N. Pugin and Andrew Jackson Downing. The chapel is largely unaltered from its original condition.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

- A. Physical History:
1. Date of construction: 1888
  2. Builders: Area families, particularly the Watsons.
  3. Alteration: An asbestos roof was replaced circa 1984 with a wooden shingled one which replicates the original.
- B. Historical Context: Constructed in 1888, St. John's was built to serve as a convenient church for families in the area at a time when a post-Civil War scarcity of horses and carriages made a long trip to church very arduous. The architect of St. John's is not known but a 1958 document on file at the Virginia Landmarks Commission shows the church being built by the Watson family who lived in "The Old Place." The church is still in use but the size of the congregation mandates that it only be utilized for occasional services.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

- A. General Statement:
1. Architectural character: This simple rectangular church is a fine example of the rural Gothic style typical of the southern United States. The architect must certainly have been familiar

with the Gothic revivalism of A.W.N. Pugin that was popularized first in this country by Andrew Jackson Downing's Cottage Residences (1842). Downing and his followers, who included such architects as Alexander Jackson Davis, John Notman, and Samuel Sloan, practiced the carpenter Gothic style. The quality of St. John's is so marked that it would not be a surprise to have further research show that it was designed by a well-known Victorian architect.

2. Condition of fabric: good

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: The basic rectangle measures 50' 2" x 26' 2". The eastern entrance extends 10' from the main block. The south (main) entrance extends 9' 4" from the building.
2. Foundation: stone
3. Walls: unbeaded wooden clapboards; diagonal clapboards between the pilasters on the south (main) elevation emphasize the steep pitch of the roof
4. Porches: There are porches attached to the south and east entrances. The Gothic pointed arch south (main) one is framed by pilasters which continue up to the roof.
5. Chimney: The brick chimney, centered on the ridge of the roof, services the two wood stoves inside.
6. Openings:
  - a. Doorways and doors: The south (main) double doors have double-raised panels and are surrounded by linenfold moldings with bull's eyes at the corners.
  - b. Windows: On the east elevation there are three sets of paired lancet windows;; two to the north of the entrance and one to the south of it. There are two sets on the west elevation. Two lancet four-over-four windows flank the main central bay. Above this bay is a wheel window with a Gothic arch and cross above.
8. Roof:
  - a. shape, covering: steeply pitched; covered with wooden shingles
  - b. dormers: Four gabled dormers house lunettes on each slope of the roof.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plan: The dimensions of the nave at St. John's Chapel are longitudinally 49' 2" and laterally 25' 2." One can enter the church from the south end, opposite the dais, or from the east side anteroom, in the English parish church tradition. This latter architectural reference is appropriate since the chapel is an Episcopal one. On the dais at the northern end of the church is a simple table used as the altar. To the right of the dais is a Gothic wooden screen behind which is storage space.
2. Wall and ceiling finish: The nave walls and exposed double-pitched roof are panelled with unpainted tongue-and-groove pine boards. A series of wooden beams support the roof and divide the church into four bays. The vestibule at the east side entry is panelled in the same manner as the nave.
3. Windows: The windows provide much of the light for the interior. They are 2' 7" off the floor, measure 7' 9" in height and vary in width. Two pointed-arch windows in the eastern vestibule are 1' 6" from the floor.
4. Mechanical equipment:
  - a. Heating: Two cast-iron wood stoves are place on line with the east porch entrance. They are vented by galvanized stove pipes which feed into a single pipe which penetrates a thimble and feeds into the brick chimney.
  - b. Lighting: Three round candle light fixtures hang from each roof beam.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission files.

Louisa County Courthouse Records Office.

Interviews with Elisabeth Nolting (trustee and member of the congregation).

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

This report was prepared by Johanna Josephs and Mary Matter, undergraduate students in architectural history at the University of Virginia School of Architecture, under the direction of K. Edward Lay, as a class project for Studies in Vernacular Architecture, fall semester 1986. It was edited and prepared for transmittal to the Library of Congress in April, 1988 by Holly K. Chamberlain, HABS historian.